

## WILLIAM RADCLIFF DE WITT

William Radcliff De Witt, the son of John De Witt and Katherine Van Vliet, was born at Paulding's Manor, Dutchess Co., New York, on the 25th of February, 1792. His ancestors were among the first immigrants from Holland to New Netherlands, in 1623. His early years were spent in commercial pursuits, but about 1810 he turned his attention to the sacred ministry. He studied with Dr. Alexander Proudfit, of Salem, N. Y., and entered Washington Academy. The War of 1812 interrupting his studies, he volunteered in the regiment of Col. Rice, and was in service at Lake Champlain at the time of McDonough's victory, September 11, 1814. After the close of the war, in 1815, he entered Nassau Hall, Princeton, as a sophomore, but subsequently entered the senior class of Union College, Schenectady, where he graduated with distinction, completing his theological studies under Rev. Dr. John M. Mason, of New York. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New York, April 23, 1818. In the fall of that year he came to Harrisburg by invitation, and was called to the pastorate of the Presbyterian church, October 5, 1818. He was received by the Presbytery of Carlisle, April 13, 1819, but not ordained until the 26th of October of that year. Dr. De Witt received the degree of A. M., in course from Union College and in 1838 the University of Pennsylvania conferred on him the title of Doctor of Divinity. From 1854 to 1860 he held the office of State Librarian, appointed by Governors Bigler and Pollock. In 1854 he felt the necessity of taking a colleague, Rev. T. H. Robinson, D. D., the present minister. He died at Harrisburg, December 23, 1867, in his 76th year.

Dr. De Witt was twice married, his first wife being Julia A. Woodhull, daughter of Rev. Nathan Woodhull, of Newtown, L. I. His second wife was Mary Elizabeth Wallace, daughter of William Wallace, of Harrisburg, who survived her husband.

During a ministry of nearly fifty years in Harrisburg, Dr. De Witt enjoyed the confidence of all his ministerial brethren. In the community he was greatly appreciated and respected by all classes. As a theologian he had few equals in the ministry, and although firm and decided in his views, he was liberal and catholic in spirit. His published writings were limited to 12 or 13 pamphlets, the most popular of which was a small volume entitled "Her Price above Riches." He preached many powerful discourses, a volume of which should certainly be preserved in permanent form.

FROM History of Dauphin & Lebanon Counties, Pa. pp 478-9  
 William Henry Egle  
 Everts & Peck  
 Philadelphia 1883



CLASS OF 1816

WILLIAM RADCLIFF DE WITT

War of 1812 record:

Quartermaster Sergeant, 114th Regiment, Rice's, N  
New York Militia.

Commencement  
Expiration

September 8, 1814  
September 22, 1814.

From Adjutant General's Office, Washington.



Recd. & Ansd. ap. 19 1833

Harrisburg April 17. 1833

To the Librarian  
of Union College

Dear Sir

I herewith send you  
a roll containing a paper with an answer,  
(I believe) to all the inquiries you  
sent to me. I am sorry that I have  
lost both your letter - and the  
blank you sent me - I had  
copied however most of the  
questions - on the blank - and  
I presume you will find them an-  
swered to your satisfaction - If  
not please make any suggestions  
you may think of and they shall



be attended to.

May I ask a note, at least,  
acknowledging the receipt of this &  
the roll I send with it

Yours most respectfully  
William R De Witt

Harroburg  
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CLASS OF 1816

WILLIAM RADCLIFFE DE WITT

Children:

William Radcliffe  
Julia  
Eleanor Wallace  
Kate Van Vliet  
Wallace  
Wallace  
Calvin  
John  
Mary

Pennsylvania Genealogies      p. 372  
Wm. Henry Egle  
Harrisburg, Pa.  
1886

WILLIAM R. DeWITT, non-graduate of 1816, a resident of Albany, N.Y., was a member of  
the Philomathean Society.      (Died: 1857)  
Philomathean Catalogue 1830



CLASS OF 1816

WILLIAM R. DE WITT

Married Julia Ann Woodhull, June 2, 1819.

She was born February 23, 1799.

He was a graduate of Union College and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1819, and pastor for nearly fifty years at Harrisburg, Pa., where he died Dec. 23, 1867, aged 75.

She died without issue, May 4, 1822.

N. Y. Gen. & Biog. Record  
Vol. 4 p. 60  
1873.



## WILLIAM RADCLIFFE DeWITT

Among the most ancient families of Holland descent that settled in the State of New York, was that of Tjenick Claase DeWitt, the first of the DeWitt family of whom we have any record. He was married in the city of New York, April 26, 1656, to Barber Andriesen, as appears by the records of the Dutch Church of that city. He is described as "van Grootholdt in Zunderlandt," and his wife as "van Amsterdam." The names of the succeeding lines are as follows: I. Andriesen, son of Tjenick Claase; II. Tjerie, son of Andriesen; III. Petrus, son of Tjerie; IV. John, son of Petrus; V. William R., son of John.

Dr. De Witt's ancestry were of that noble race of men, who were Calvinists in religion, and republican in politics, for many generations.

The Dutch were almost universally of the Reformed Churches in religious faith, and sturdy lovers of freedom in the State. Memorable in the Old World for their devotion to liberty and religion, the family of the DeWitts partook of the spirit of its race, and was early distinguished for its patriotism and devotion to country. Four generations have each furnished defenders in times of national peril. From some ancient relics in the family, we learn that Petrus DeWitt was a captain in the old French war, and fought under Wolfe, at the siege and capture of Quebec. His son, John DeWitt, during the entire Revolutionary war, was the captain of a company of minute men appointed to guard the loyal citizens against the incessant and troublesome raids of Tories, who abounded in the section of the country north of New York. After the close of the war, he was elected a member of the Convention of the State of New York, and voted for the adoption of the Constitution of the United States.

William Radcliffe DeWitt, the sixth son of John DeWitt, was born at Paulding's Manor, Dutchess county, N. Y., on the 25th of February, 1792. He was named after his uncle, the Hon. William Radcliffe, of Rhinebeck, Dutchess county. The family of the Radcliffes, to which the mother of Dr. DeWitt belonged, were distinguished in civil life; one of them, Jacob DeWitt, serving for several years as a Judge of the Supreme Court of the State of New York; another, Peter Radcliffe, an eminent lawyer of the New York bar, and a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Kings County; and a third, William Radcliffe, for many years United States Consul at Demerara.

At the early age of ten years, he was deprived, by her death, of the counsel and love of a mother. After spending several of his early years in school, and receiving a common English education, William R. was employed as a clerk, first in his father's store in the city of Albany, New York, afterwards with his brother Cornelius, in Fairfield, Herkimer county, and later still in the store of his father and brother at Newburg, New York. At about the age of fifteen he entered the employ of Cairns & Lord, dry goods merchants, of the city of New York, and continued with them until the year 1811. Whilst residing with them, and in their store, his mind became much exercised on the subject of his own personal salvation; and on January 8, 1810, he made a public profession of



religion, connecting himself with the Presbyterian church in Cedar Street, then under the pastoral care of Rev. John B. Romeyn, D. D. Shortly afterward his attention was turned to the sacred ministry, and his own duty in respect to it.

After careful consideration and prayer over the matter, Mr. DeWittfelt called of God to relinquish all worldly ends, and prepare for the responsible office ; and in 1811, then in his nineteenth year, he left New York and went to reside with Rev. Alexander Proudfit, of Salem, Washington county, New York, and entering Washington Academy, began a course of classical studies under the tuition of Mr. Stevenson, the principal of the school.

While still a student at Washington Academy. the second war with Great Britain broke out, and leaving his studies, young DeWitt enlisted as a volunteer in the regiment of Colonel Rice, that was called out to resist the invasion of the British at Plattsburg, and was on Lake Champlain at the time of McDonough's victory, September 11, 1814, when the whole British fleet became the trophies of American valor. After the close of the war, sometime in the year 1815, he entered Nassau Hall, Princeton, New Jersey, as a Sophomore, and remained there until his senior year, when because of an interruption in his studies of the college, he withdrew and entered the senior class of Union College, Schenectady, N. Y.

Leaving Union College before the close of the senior year, Mr. DeWitt returned to New York, and entered the Theological Seminary of the Associate Reformed Church. While in this Seminary Mr. DeWitt connected himself with the Presbytery of New York and was licensed by that body on April 23, 1818. The summer months of 1818 were spent in preaching in the State of New York, but early in the fall of that year, having received from a friend an invitation to visit Harrisburg (Pa) he came thither and spent two weeks, preaching to the people several times. The result was that a unanimous call to become Pastor was given him on October 5, 1818. The call was accepted and soon after he came on and commenced his ministry. Unit-ing with the Presbytery of Carlisle, at the earliest opportunity he passed the usual examination required for ordination, and on the 26th of October, 1819, he was ordained to the office of the sacred ministry in the First Presbyterian church of Carlisle, and on November 12th, 1819, he was installed as Pastor of this church, having already served in the pulpit for over one year.

The main events of the history of the Church during the pastorate of Dr. DeWitt are rehearsed elsewhere and need not be alluded to in this personal sketch. Dr. De Witt was twice married. His first wife, whom he married on June 22, 1819, was Julia Anna Woodhull, daughter of Rev. Nathan Woodhull, Long Island. This happy relation was sadly broken, within three years, by the death of Mrs. DeWitt, May 1, 1822. Memories of her long lingered in the congregation as a woman of great personal beauty and attractiveness, of refined and winnigg manners, accomplished mind and unaffected piety of



heart and life. On March 15, 1825, he married Mary Elizabeth Wallace, daughter of William and Eleanor MacLay Wallace, of Harrisburg. This union, by the kind providence of God, was continued until severed by his own death, a period of nearly forty years.

Dr. De Witt received the degree of A. M. in course from Union College, and on July 13, 1838, he was honored by the University of Pennsylvania, at Philadelphia, with the title of Doctor of Divinity.

He was called by the courts of his own denomination to serve as Moderator and to discharge high and responsible duties. He was a member of several of the General Assemblies of the Church.

With the originators and leading men in that earliest and greatest of American agencies for evangelizing the world, "The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," he maintained a life long friendship and hearty co-operation, having been chosen a corporate member of the society in 1838, and in 1842 receiving the honor of an appointment to preach before the Board the annual sermon.

In the closing years of his life, when the burdens of the pastorate became heavy and he sought the aid of a colleague, he accepted the office of State Librarian that was pressed upon him by the Governor of the Commonwealth, and discharged its duties with great faithfulness through two terms, a period of six years.

Dr. De Witt was a facile and elegant writer, but was disinclined to publish his writings. The following list comprises all that are known of his private discourses:

1. A Discourse in behalf of the Colonization Society;
2. A Sermon on the Death of Adams and Jefferson;
3. On the Evils of Intemperance;
4. An Address of the Death of Gov. F. R. Shunk;
5. A Pastoral Letter to the Churches under the care of the Presbytery of Harrisburg;
6. A small volume entitled, "Her Price above Rubies;"
7. The Sermon before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions;
8. An Address at the Dedication of the Harrisburg Cemetery;
9. A Sermon on the Death of Rev. Dr. Moody;
- 10, 11, 12. Three synodical sermons, entitled, "Ministerial Responsibility," "Prayer for Zion," and "The Church that Christ Loved;"
13. A Sermon when Seventy Years of Age.

The ties that bound him to this church, the church of his early and his life-long love, the only one among all the churches of America that he had ever called his own, and for whose sake he had refused repeated calls and solicitations to settle elsewhere, seemed only to grow stronger as the burden of years divorced him from active labors in its behalf.



Here he had buried their dead and his own. To them he had given the dew of his youth, the strength of his manhood, the care and counsel of his ripest years. It was natural and reasonable that, after so long a pastorate, he should desire to live and die among the people to whom he had, for nearly half a century, preached the unsearchable riches of Christ; and that the bond between him and them, of pastor and people, should only be broken, on the edge of the grave. It was a wish often expressed. The wish was gratified; for while he yielded to his colleague the active duties and pastoral care of the church, he retained, to the moment of his death, his relation to the church as its senior pastor. His official labors were now nearly accomplished. So long as he was able to go out at all, even when the increasing infirmities of years weighed heavily upon him, he attended the house of God, at the Sabbath service and the social meetings of the church, taking his accustomed seat in the pulpit. His last public address was in behalf of the female prayer meeting of the church, which, during the whole of his long ministry, had been regularly maintained, and had proved a most faithful ally to his labors. He spoke with great tenderness of its past history, and urged upon all the female members of the church an attendance at its weekly gatherings. His last official duty is believed to have been the examination of a young candidate for the ministry. Sitting up in his bed, he faithfully and kindly, drew from the young man an account of his religious experience, of his views of the ministry, his call to the work, and purpose in entering upon it; and, with the experience of half a century before him, uttered his words of counsel and encouragement, and pronounced his benediction upon the youthful worker.

The elements of personal character and of personal power over others, very seldom proceed from the pre-eminence of one distinguishing trait; but usually from the combination of many qualities, physical, mental and moral. There was no one element in the character of Dr. De Witt that would instantly and universally be pointed out, as the source of his influence, or the characteristic of his life. There was rather a balance of qualities and elements in him that preserved him from all idiosyncracies.

There was weight in his personal presence. There was that in his appearance and bearing, when in his prime, or in his vigor of full health, that inspired respect and indicated power. His person was of full size, and good proportions, in early and middle life, and was the expression of manly vigor and dignity. Those who remember him as he entered upon his ministry here, speak of his handsome and imposing ~~appearance~~, presence, his noble carriage, his finely developed frame, and glowing, manly countenance. And, at the latest years of his life, when his step was enfeebled and slow, and the body began to bend, his patriarchal aspect, as the whitened locks gathered like a crown of glory on his head, the calmness and gravity of a face so slightly altered by age, secured for him an involuntary homage and deference.



He was a man warmly social and genial in his temperament. His home life was filled with true and tender affections; and they who have often met him in society, know that there were few who could better enliven and entertain than Dr. De Witt. He was a ready and fluent talker, a man of quick impulses and generous feelings, of ready wit, apt at repartee; and when he opened his fund of reminiscences of earlier times and men, all were ready to listen. In the meetings of the Presbytery and Pastoral Association of this city, his presence was ever welcomed as that of a friend of peace, a genial spirit, a pattern of gentleness and forbearance. And in his own congregation, though often deeply depressed and despondent over his labors, there was never a substantial sorrow to which he did not give his presence, or a grief that lacked his sympathy.

Dr. De Witt was a man of self-depreciative and modest nature. With a keen and high sense of his calling as a minister of the Gospel, and an honest desire to preach the Gospel worthily and powerfully, he seldom left the pulpit without a sense of failure and personal unfitness, wholly unwarranted by the character of his preaching, either in the matter, or the manner of its delivery. There was no self-glory in his nature.

Dr. De Witt was a man of unquestioned power as a preacher. His position at this center of influence, the capital of the State, gave him uncommon opportunities of reaching many men of intellectual standing and of great influence from all parts of the State. He was a man of fine scholarship. He possessed a voice of great sweetness, clearness of tone and power. As a reader of Holy Scriptures very few excelled him. In his early ministry, his preaching is said to have been peculiarly bold and eloquent in manner; and by the added novelty, beauty and pungency of his thoughts, stirred to the depths the elements of society. His discourses were written with great clearness and purity of style. Many of his sermons were, in their matter, form, and in their delivery, were models of pulpit eloquence. He was impressive, dignified and graceful. Other men have excelled him in versatility of talent; but it has fallen to the lot of few men to mould educational, moral and religious influences in so wide a sphere and through so many years. The end at which he aimed was the turning of men to God and the training of religious life of his people; and his chief instrumentality was the studious and careful preparation and the impressive delivery of good sermons.

He was eminently a Christian preacher. Converted in his early youth; brought under the influence of men whose praise was in the American Churches for their zeal, and piety, and deep devotion to the cause of Christ; drawn by his own youthful ardor into the ministry, preaching of the Gospel was a work of love. And to his vision all truth arranged itself around one center--the cross of the world's Redeemer. From that center he seldom strayed; seeking to obey the maxim of an old divine, to have enough of Christ in every discourse to point the way of approach to Him to any inquiring soul. He was decidedly evangelical and scriptural. He cared little for human speculations, dealt sparingly in what may be called the philosophy of Christianity; but taking the truths of the Divine Word as they are revealed; the lost, ruined, helpless condition of man as a sinner; the provision which God has



for his recovery in a vicarious atonement; the contrasts of law and grace; the character and completeness of that righteousness of Jesus Christ which is "imputed unto us and received by faith alone;" the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; the divine nature and kingly authority of Jesus Christ; the relation of his atoning blood to all promises of good, all growth in Christian life, and all hopes of heaven; as well as to all threatenings of evil, and the condemnation of the guilty; in the region of these and related truths, that bring the great facts and principles of the Gospel before the mind, Dr. DeWitt was a preacher of great power. Clearness, precision, force, characterized his demonstrations; fullness, fervor and pathos marked his appeals. Perceiving the glory and feeling the preciousness of the truth himself, he exhausted his powers to secure a like impression on the mind and heart of his hearers.

A Presbyterian by birth, education and preference in his theological views, in all the habits of his thoughts, conservative and jealous of the new and untried, he was yet liberal and catholic in spirit. Never wavering in his preferences for, and adherence to the church to which he was attached, there was yet no spirit of exclusiveness in him, that claimed for his denomination all truth and goodness. During a ministry of nearly fifty years in this city, he enjoyed the confidence of all his ministerial brethren. He was ready to assist them in every good work, and seldom, in public prayer, omitted to call down the blessing of God upon them and their churches. Toward all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, he preserved a true affection, and upon them all besought the grace, mercy and peace of God.

Dr. DeWitt came here in his youth, but with a mind admirably trained for the work that was before him. For thirty-six years he stood in the pulpit of this church sole pastor. He was the teacher and guide of the people. He quietly planted the seeds of divine truth; he worked about the roots of character. He infused his own conceptions of saving doctrine into the minds of two generations. He was the regular visitant upon multiplying families. He baptized the children, guided inquirers, and welcomed hundreds to the table of communion. He linked his life with hundreds of other lives in beneficent influence, and buried sadly from his sight the generation that welcomed his coming.

During the last years of his life he preached but seldom, having relinquished to his colleague the care of the church, but he continued still to illustrate the beauties of Christian character and the power of the Gospel he had so long proclaimed. His mental power remained unimpaired. His thought of the coming world became softened and subdued by the light that was breaking upon him from the heavenly world. His earthly cares were dismissed and he waited the summons of departure. He spoke of his departure with calmness, yet with tenderness of feeling. It came as he had long desired--suddenly, and without pain and helplessness. In a moment "the golden bowl was broken," and he was gone from earthly intercourse to renew in another world the severed bonds of love and fellowship, and to greet the redeemed and holy ones who from the communion of this church had preceded him to glory.



It would be unjust to the memory of one who impressed her life very deeply upon the lives of many in the church not to mention briefly Mrs. Mary E. DeWitt, who for so many years seconded the labors of her husband by her own.

Mary Elizabeth Wallace, wife of William R. DeWitt, D.D., was the daughter of William Wallace and Eleanor Maclay. She was born in Eire, Pennsylvania, May 7, 1807, whither he father had removed from Harrisburg after his marriage. She was the first born of the household. The family returned to Harrisburg in 1810. Mrs. DeWitt was closely connected with the prominent families in the town. John Harris, the founder of the town was her great-grandfather. William Maclay, the first Senator from Pennsylvania in the United States Senate, was her grandfather. Her father established the Harrisburg Bank and was its first President. A large part of her early life was spent in the Maclay house, now the Harrisburg Academy property and the residence of Professor Jacob F. Seiler. Her father died when she was but nine years of age, in 1816. He then resided on the southeast corner of Second street and Cherry alley. After his death the family occupied the Maclay house until the death of Mrs. Wallace, in 1823. The marriage of Mary E. Maclay and Rev. W. R. DeWitt took place in 1825, while she was residing with her great-uncle, Robert Harris, in the ancient Harris house on Front street, in later days the residence of the Honorable Simon Cameron.

One of her brothers, Rev. Benjamin J. Wallace, rose to eminence in the Presbyterian Church as preacher and writer, and as editor for years of "The Presbyterian Review." He died at an early age.

Mrs. DeWitt married at the age of eighteen, but her mind was already matured and peculiarly bright and strong. She entered at once and very heartily into the work of the church and until her death, fifty-six years later she was an honored and wise leader. For forty-two years in the ministry of her husband she was permitted to stand by his side, in the home, in society and in the church, and everywhere helpful and beloved. She was a woman of rare powers of mind, of wide information and admirable judgment. Her home acknowledged her beneficent sway. Society was charmed by her conversational powers, her tact, her winning courtesy and intelligence. In the church she was at the head of the religious and benevolent work undertaken by the women of the congregation. For about fifty years she was a faithful and uncommonly able teacher in the Sunday-school of the church. The female prayer-meeting of the church, established in her childhood, received her hearty co-operation and regular attendance for more than half a century. Those who were favored in hearing her voice in these meetings testify to her remarkable power in prayer. Few laymen in the church equalled her in power of expression, range of thought and fluency, joined to spiritual fervor and tenderness. She was surrounded through life by those who trusted, admired and loved her. She was calm in temperament, hopeful in spirit, broad in her charity and judicious in her utterances. Few have evinced so high, so tenacious and so courageous faith. Kind and liberal in her feelings and words towards all, she lived and died without enemies. Though suffering severely in her last days from physical pain, she



CLASS OF 1816--William R. DeWitt---8.

retained all her faculties of mind unimpaired. Her trust in God, her composure of spirit and her love towards others never failed her. Death found her peaceful and serene and could not disturb her repose in God. A very precious memory survives her in this city and in the church where the greater part of her life was spent.

By Rev. Thomas H. Robinson, D. D.

Centennial Memorial--1794-1894.  
English Presbyterian Congregation  
Harrisburg, Pa.  
George B. Stewart, Editor  
Harrisburg, Pa.  
1894.

pp.360-368



DeWitt, William R.  
From: Salem, N.Y.  
Last residence: Harrisburg, Pa.

16 u.

Records show one  
William R. DeWitt  
Qm Sgt., 114th Regt (Rice's) N.Y. Militia

Commencement of service: Sept 8, 1814  
Expiration of service : Sept 22, 1814

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1816

William R. DeWitt.

Married: Last evening at Newtown, L. I., by the Rev. Dr. Romeyne, Rev.  
William R. DeWitt, of Harrisburg, Pa., to Miss Julia A. Woodhull, daughter  
of the late Rev. A. Woodhull, of the former place. - New-York Advertiser, June 3,  
1819.

UCSLA F1816 dewitt - W - 00016



CLASS OF 1816

WILLIAM R. DE WITT

On Sunday evening, January 21st, the Rev. Thomas H. Robinson was ordained and installed colleague pastor of the church in Harrisburg, Pa., by the Presbytery of Harrisburg. The Rev. Dr. De Witt has been pastor of this church for thirty-six years, and still retains his pastoral connection with it. At the same time and place, the Presbytery ordained the Rev. James Dixon, to do the work of an Evangelist.

Prof. Pearson's Scrap Book      p. 325

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William Radcliff DeWitt 1816



William Radcliff DeWitt 1816